2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

SOME ANNUAL FESTIVALS

(*cf.* p. 266, Fig. 152) in another had collected large and interested audiences. The poet was accompanied in his recitations by a woman—and sometimes by two or three men as well—who beat a single-membrane drum. Peep-shows also contributed to the amusement, the pictures shown usually representing favourite national saints and heroes and heroines. Lastly, roughly made little cars hung on wheels, which turned round and round on a horizontal axis, were much patronized by the children (Fig. 144).

A special sheikh of this district, later to conduct the *zikr* (see

FIG. 144. SWINGS, WHEELS WITH HANGING CARS, AND OTHER AMUSEMENTS AT A SHEIKH'S MŪLID

below) in honour of the sainted Umbārak, paraded through the crowd on a donkey, preceded by three men carrying large banners decorated with various designs and inscriptions, and by musicians playing on cymbals and a double-membrane drum. One of the banners belonged to the sheikh Umbārak, but the others came from the tombs of sheikhs in neighbouring villages. Such banners are always carried in procession on the occasion of a *mūlid*, and the men who bear them advance with dancing steps instead of an ordinary walk.

It should be mentioned here that a *zikr* is a kind of religious dance performed by men and older boys only; the women and girls never take part in it. A detailed description of it is given later on.

In spite of the heat, millions of flies, and clouds of dust, the

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THE FELLAḤIN OF UPPER EGYPT

796 In spite of the help 1 minions of flies, and clouds of dust, the
769 festival of the sheikh Umbārak was conducted with the utmost good humour, and the behaviour of the crowds was perfect. It came to an end at about seven o'clock.

On the following day the annual *mūlid* of the sheikh Ṣabr was celebrated at his village, which is most picturesquely situated on the bank of the Yūsuf Canal. As I have stated in Chapter XV, this sheikh is much venerated, not only in his own village, but in villages for many miles around. I have been present at his *mūlid* on two or three occasions, and each time large crowds have assembled to do him honour.

The festival begins in the morning at about eleven o'clock, and a number of people joined me as I rode through the fields on my way to the village. Upon these occasions a brisk trade is always carried
[443] on, and piles of brightly coloured sweets are exposed for sale, together with toys, cheap ornaments, dates, and other delicacies. The vendors seat themselves under rough booths, which they erect on the spot, and under which they can take shelter from the fierce rays of the sun.

796 When I arrived a large *ẓikr* was taking place under the shade
788 of the branches of the sacred tree. It was executed by a number
769 of men forming a circle round the sheikh who conducted this religious exercise. The men swayed rhythmically from side to side, nodded their heads, or bent backward and forward as they pronounced the name of Allāh over and over again. The presiding sheikh beat time by clapping his hands, while now and then a *fiḳīh* would chant passages from the Ḳorān. The ceremony was conducted with great earnestness and solemnity, but some of the performers became so worked up with religious fervour that from time to time they leaped into the air, and finally fell on the ground from exhaustion.

796 Close to where this religious performance was taking place was
769 to be found the usual large wheel, with its hanging seats. Here
[529] the children had congregated, all of them clamouring for a ride, as they are to be seen doing about the whirligigs and swings provided at the fairs in England.

[538] At another spot a poet had collected a large audience, which listened with evident enjoyment while he gave his recitations to
[533] the accompanying beats of two tambourines and a shallow, single-membrane drum (*cf.* p. 266, Fig. 152).

The banners were much in evidence at this festival, and I